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OLD FAMILIES AND HOUSES—GREEN- LEAF'S POINT.

BY MRS. JEANNIE TREE RIVES.

(Read before the Society January 7, 1901.)

So much has been said about Greenleaf's Point of late that I am afraid what I have to say to-night will prove but an "old, old story." Named after James Greenleaf, one of the pioneer settlers of the new city of Washington, it presents a very different appearance now to what it did in 1800. The shifting of the sands, and the many changes made in the course of time, have obliterated many of the old landmarks. I am assured by an old resident who made a recent pilgrimage to the spot, that it was almost impossible for him to recognize places familiar to him in boyhood. As I stood on the extreme point and looked all around, I felt that no fairer or sweeter spot could have been selected as the beginning of a new city, and yet for some unaccountable reason the city spread in another direction. The Anacostia empties into the Potomac at this point and the view of the river is very fine. This point, well known to the Indians of the vicinity, formed one of their favorite camping grounds. Robert Morris, John Nicholson and James Greenleaf, of Philadelphia, bought very largely of land in Washington, particularly in this locality; some of it was paid for, the balance was thrown into Chancery and was sold at public auction. A number of houses were projected, some few were finished, but many being left in a half-finished state gradually fell into decay, after having been occupied by negroes and low whites.

The most graphic description of Greenleaf's Point, is to be found in the letters of Oliver Wolcott and John Cotton Smith, written in 1800; they are perfect pen pictures. The Government early established a military depot at this point under the control of Mr. Villiard, a Frenchman, who had served under Lafayette; this was probably the nucleus of the present Arsenal.

The old Washingtonians are "slowly drifting out with the tide," as Dickens so beautifully expresses it, but some few descendants of the early settlers are still with us, among them the Davidges and the Readdings, descendants of Richard Bland Lee, first Judge of the Orphans' Court in Washington. The Fenwicks, descendants of Notley Young, the Nicholsons and the Greenleafs—Col. Greenleaf, U. S. A., being a descendant of James Greenleaf. Col. Greenleaf married Miss De La Roche, of Georgetown, a descendant of the De La Roche, Aide to Gen. Lafayette. Longfellow also married into the Greenleaf family. I had hoped to have been able to give a fuller account of this family, but owing to the uncertainty of mails, a letter addressed to Col. Greenleaf, at Manila, failed to reach him in time for this article. As early as 1795, James Greenleaf presented the vestry of Christ Church, Navy Yard, with a lot on square 456, east of the Post Office. At the same time Samuel Blodgett contributed the lumber to build the church. Previous to the Revolution, a barn was fitted up as a church, and was used for religious purposes for nearly thirty years, the Rev. A. T. McCormick being the rector. It was attached to St. John's Parish, Prince George County, Md. May 11, 1806, Mr. Wm. Prout gave the land where the present Christ Church stands. In 1809 it was dedicated by the Rt. Rev. Thomas John Claggett, Bishop of Maryland. The "old

sugar house" stood on Coumbes Wharf; the Coumbes family were then residents of Greenleaf's Point, but later, I am told, moved to one of the lower counties of Maryland. One of the daughters of Mr. Coumbes married John D. Barry, who owned Barry Farm, now Hillsdale, Anacostia. Barry Farm comprised about 375 acres and adjoins St. Elizabeth Asylum, south of the Eastern Branch. In 1868, it was purchased by the Freedman's Bureau, was divided into house lots of one acre each, and was offered to the Freedmen at cost, the Bureau furnishing each lot-owner with a portion of the lumber for a house, payment to be made within two years in equal monthly installments, the lots to be forfeited if the stipulations were not complied with. The farm sold for \$52,000. Mrs. Talbott, one of the Barry family, resides at Hillsdale, being now nearly 90 years of age. Barry Chapel is said to have been built by this family; the corner stone of this Chapel is said to be in possession of St. Dominic's Church, South Washington. One of the most noted novels of the day, called "What is Gentility?" was written by Mrs. M. H. Smith, wife of Samuel Harrison Smith, the first publisher of the *National Intelligencer*. The Smiths were residents of Greenleaf's Point, their house standing in what is now the Arsenal grounds. So also were the grandparents of Mr. Lewis J. Davis, so well known in this Society. The old Penitentiary also occupied a part of the grounds of the present Arsenal. My brother described the whipping of the convicts as witnessed by him sixty years ago. A huge wooden paddle was used, perforated with holes, instead of a lash, and two men flogged the convict alternately; the punishment was cruel in the extreme. The first colored school in the District, occupied the site of Providence Hospital. It was founded in 1807, by three slaves, Nicholas Franklin and Moses Liverpool, from the southern part of Vir-

ginia, caulkers at the Washington Navy Yard; and George Bell, a slave of Mr. Anthony Addison's, of "Oxon Hill," Md. A white man, a Mr. Lowe, was the first teacher. Later, educating negroes was made punishable by a fine. Curiously enough, I have heard in the last few days, why this law was enacted. The Rev. Mason Noble was pastor, at this time, of the Fourth Presbyterian Church, on Ninth Street, N. W. The white Sunday-school, of one hundred and fifty pupils, had morning session, and the colored held afternoon session; there were over three hundred colored pupils in the Sunday-school. A man from the North asked permission to address the colored school. After a few preliminary remarks he launched into a furious tirade against the South, and finally wound up by telling the negroes that they had three remedies in their hands, "the bowl, the knife, and the torch," poison, murder and incendiarism. This speech created such intense feeling that a law was passed forbidding the education of negroes. The curfew law was in force up to 1862, no slaves being allowed on the streets after 9 P. M., without a written permit from their masters. Notices appeared in the *Evening Star* as late as 1862, notifying owners of slaves of their confinement in jail, Fourth and G Streets, N. W., for being found on the streets after 9 P. M. without passes, and stating that owners would be required to pay a fine in order to regain possession of their slaves, the notice being signed "Ward H. Lamon, U. S. Marshall, under President Lincoln." Negroes were also forbidden to pick blackberries outside of the city limits without a written permit. The following letter, addressed to the Mayor and City Council of Washington, may prove of some interest in connection with the other paper to be read to-night:—

Joseph Jefferson, the illustrious comedian, father of the present Joseph Jefferson, was in connection with another gentleman, lessee of the Washington Theatre. On the 15th of July, 1833, they addressed the following letter to the "City Councils":—

"Dear Sir:

"Permit us to take the liberty of representing to you, a burden that oppresses us most heavily, and of requesting your kind endeavors so to represent the case before the Mayor and Council, that we may obtain all the relief that it is in your power to grant. You must be aware that we pay nightly, to the city, a tax of \$6 for permission to perform in the Theatre. In the year 1832 this amounted to nearly \$1,400 in the aggregate; we pay this tax cheerfully, and all we ask in return is a liberal protection and support from the city authorities. There is at present a law in force which authorizes the constables of the city to arrest the colored people if on the streets after 9 o'clock without a pass. A great proportion of our audience consists of persons of this caste, and they are consequently deterred from giving us that support that they would otherwise do. Can there be any modification of that law suggested, or will the Mayor and Council authorize us to give passes to those colored people who leave the theatre for the purpose of proceeding directly to their homes? In the city of Baltimore, where we have a theatre, we pay a smaller license than we do here, the law as regards colored people is not acted upon when they are coming to or going from the theatre. In a pecuniary point of view, we look upon this law as a detriment to us of \$10 nightly, and we have great reason to hope that a law that rests so heavily upon us alone, may meet with the kindly consideration of the Mayor and Council, and be so modified as to re-

lieve us from the heavy losses that it causes us at present to incur. We have the honor to be, dear sir,

“Your obedient servants,

“JEFFERSON & MAKENSIE,

“Managers of the Washington Theatre.”

The house on New Jersey Avenue, near B Street, now owned by the heirs of D. W. Middleton, clerk of the Supreme Court, was formerly the old “Bank of Washington”; it is said that the old vaults are still in the house. Mr. Adams, cashier of the bank, was the executor of Thomas Law. Mr. Townsend referred to this fact in his able paper on Thomas Law. Opposite it stood the Columbia Fire Engine House, the neighborhood back of the engine house being known as Frog Hollow. Next to it stood the Coast Survey office. I am inclined to think that this may have been the second “Tunnicliff Hotel,” the first one being on the S. W. cor. of 9th and Pa. Ave., S. E. The Coast Survey recalls old Mr. Hassler, the founder of it, and his old yellow traveling carriage so often described by my father. In it he carried his wardrobe, instruments, cooking utensils and camp equipage, frequently eating and sleeping in it. Mr. Hassler was a Swiss by birth, and was one of Napoleon’s surveyors. Perhaps Mrs. Newcomb, his granddaughter, may be induced to tell us more about him. The stone yard of “Prevost & Winter,” I think, stood at the corner of New Jersey avenue and B street; Gen. Butler afterwards built a home on the site of the old stone yard. It extended from Maryland to New Jersey Avenue. Much of the stone used in the extension of the Capitol was cut here. In looking over some old *Intelligencers* I find an advertisement of the “Managers of Washington Assembly,” probably the first Assembly held. It reads “An Assembly to be held at Stelle’s

Hotel November 25, 1800, at 5 P. M."—thus showing that early hours were kept, and also that our forebears had brought with them the taste for "Assemblies" such as were held in Philadelphia at the time. These Assembly balls were kept up many years. Some of them were held at Jackson Hall, known later as the *Congressional Globe* office, Pennsylvania Avenue, between Four-and-one-half and Third Streets. Stelle's Hotel was kept by Pontius D. Stelle, and is supposed to have occupied the site filled later by the "Old Capitol."

It is said "there is nothing new under the sun." I was amused at an advertisement, under date of November, 1800, of a "Learned Pig" on "exposition" at the "White House," a tavern on New Jersey Avenue, not far from Pennsylvania Avenue. This shows conclusively that "Wicked Ben" was not the only and original learned pig, but only a base imitator. I have been trying to locate the "old Shiloh Church," an "Old School" or "Hard Shell Baptist" church, as it was called. It was on the Island. I think it must have been near Virginia Avenue, between Sixth and Seventh Streets. My mother was a member of this church, and I remember attending it as a child. We crossed the old canal at Four-and-one-half or at Seventh Street. The church was an isolated building, destitute of paint or whitewash, but scrupulously neat and clean. It stood in the midst of a grove of trees, and on Sunday reminded me of the Quaker meeting at Sandy Spring, Maryland. Horses were hitched to the trees, and buggies and vehicles of all description were around among them. Going to church was an all-day affair. Every one had a large lunch basket, well filled with eatables, and all remained over for afternoon service. The Rev. Mr. Leachman, the pastor of the church, lived in Virginia and rode over on horseback, his legs protected from the

miry roads by huge cowhide boots. He would walk gravely into church, saddle-bags in hand, which he would deposit near the door in a vacant pew. The church was heated by a large drum, or cylinder stove, around which the men would collect in snowy weather, and there would be an overpowering smell of smoking shoe leather pervading the edifice. The pews were large and very high and almost hid us children from view. Mr. Leachman was a very fervid speaker, though evidently a self-taught man, one of the "salt of the earth." In his fervor he would pound his desk and Bible so forcibly that we children would nearly jump out of our seats. The congregation were devout and earnest men and women, among whom I recall the Towles, Edmonston and Bryan families, all old citizens of Washington. They believed in immersion in the river, and I remember seeing several baptisms, Mr. Leachman being the clergyman who officiated on the occasions. I have ascertained since writing this article that the "Shiloh Baptist Church" was situated on D Street, between Four-and-one-half and Sixth Streets. It was afterwards known as the "Island Baptist Church."

In my other paper I referred to the "Columbia Medical College," northeast corner of Tenth and E Streets. Through Solomon Brown, a trusted colored employé at the Smithsonian Institution, I have heard of a fire and very nearly a riot that occurred in connection with this building. The dissecting room was at the top of the building and was covered by a skylight of rather peculiar construction. The fire broke out in this room, and the firemen in order to reach it were compelled to get on the roofs of the adjoining houses and splice ladders together to reach the roof of the College, breaking the skylight to introduce the hose. The fire finally was gotten so far under control as to allow the firemen to

enter the building. They immediately began throwing articles out of the windows—bones, skulls, and finally the body of an infant, the child of a colored shoemaker in the neighborhood known as “Baptist Butler.” It very nearly created a riot among the colored people. Solomon Brown was a lad at the time, and was office boy to my uncle, Dr. Borrows, my grandfather’s house being only a few doors from the college. Solomon Brown also recollects the “Snow riots” very well. I think that was referred to in Mr. Clephane’s paper. The *Baltimore Sun* in early days used to illustrate its advertisements by wood cuts. For instance, a “runaway negro advertisement” would have a cut representing a negro lad with thick lips and kinky hair, hatless and shoeless, a bundle on a stick carried over one shoulder—the *Clippers*, for which Baltimore was so famous, had a ship in full sail as an advertisement. My father used to tell a most amusing story of a woman who had plenty of money, but no education. Indeed it was whispered broadly that Mrs. ——— could neither read nor write. Passing her house one day, my father was rather astonished at seeing Mrs. ——— sitting on her doorstep apparently reading the *Baltimore Sun*. As he approached she looked up and spoke to him. In a spirit of mischief he said: “Is there anything new in the paper this morning, Mrs. ———?” She said: “Oh, yes! Mr. Tree, there has been a terrific storm at sea, and all the ships are turned bottom upwards.” As she spoke he glanced at the paper—she was holding it upside down!

In Miss Miller’s paper she spoke of Labbè’s Dancing School. Among some old notes I find a brief account of the Labbè family which may prove of interest, as they were very well known in Washington. François Labbè emigrated from France in 1812. He settled in Philadelphia, and began the printing of calicoes. Not

being successful, he next started a dancing school, which succeeded well. I do not know when they moved to Washington, but they opened a dancing school opposite Willard's, about where Cornwell's grocery now stands. His two children succeeded him in the dancing school, Miss Emily, the daughter, being a most refined, gentle person and a great favorite. Frank Labbè, the son, was the "Turveydrop" of his day, a perfect "Master of Deportment." I remember the stocks where the children had to stand until they learned to "turn out their toes properly," and the old colored man who played the violin for the children.

One other picture is very vivid in my mind. It is an old "tan yard" that stood at the intersection of H., New York Avenue and Thirteenth Street, belonging to Mr. Cover. I fancy I can almost smell the fresh, cool aroma of the bark, and see the huge vats containing the skins, and the old horse winding his weary rounds treading out the bark. It was so cool in the hot summer days that we children delighted in going in to watch the grinding of the bark, and cool off after our play. I hope that I have not exceeded the time allotted to me or worn out the patience of the audience by these old-time reminiscences.